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Staff photo by Mark Bailey

Robert Monroe, founder of institute in Nelson County, helped pioneer work with sound waves

Reporter's state of mind changes during test

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I went to the Monroe Institute intending to listen to discussion of a new learning technique, but as soon as the 30 school administrators and media representatives got settled in the comfortable conference room chairs, we all became participants.

During most of the three-hour seminar, music was playing in the background while two educational researchers explained their technique for enhancing learning.

The music alone was calming and made sitting in the rather warm room in 100 percent humidity a little more pleasant.

But if Devon Edrington and Jo Dee Owens are correct, the sounds I was not aware of hearing were actually responsible for my favorable state of mind.

The sounds, when heard alone, would make great background noises for a spaceship in a George Lucas film. I could easily imagine a silver disc landing in a field in the 500-acre Institute property.

But masked by music, the sound waves bear no resemblance to anything sci-fi. The total package sounds like something my mother would have been playing on the stereo — if my little brothers hadn't gotten there first.

During the lecture and discussion phases of the seminar I did not notice any overwhelming urge to be especially attentive, but later I realized that there were few gaps in my notes — an indication that my mind did not wander much, as it tends to do during three-hour seminars.

The noticeable difference in my state of mind came only when the formal lecturing and discussion stopped and we did some real honest-to-gosh testing of the "Hemi-Sync" tape Ms. Owens uses on her first-grade students.

When the tape started I was primarily concerned with whether I should continue to take notes or experience "Hemi-Sync" with everyone else. I decided to forget my pen and see what happened.

The first few moments were not impressive; I knew only that my legs were tired of sitting and it was too hot in the conference room.

I closed my eyes and listened to the tape. As the music played, I could discern other sounds — water and a train. I was assailed by a strong waft of pine cleanser.

My head felt heavy; I saw a tun-

Please see Reporter, Page B-5

Continued from Page B-1

nel of light. I started walking down stairs beside the light. There were train noises, but there was no train, just steps that always went down, never up.

When the tape ended, I opened my eyes, slightly proud that I had relaxed into a daydream — a seemingly good state to be in at the time.

I realized the heat of the room was no longer bothersome. It actually felt cooler. Possibly because, as one scientifically inclined administrator pointed out, your pulse rate slows when you are relaxed.

With just one experience with "Hemi-Sync" behind me, I still have some questions about its use in the classroom, but I am eager to see what the Tacoma school system has to say about it in a year.

And, I am trying to figure out how much it would cost to install "Hemi-Sync" in the newsroom.